

Northern Gardener

DIGITAL SPRING PLANNING ISSUE 2025

NEW PLANTS FOR THE
NEW YEAR

Spring
Forward!

Your planning guide
for the upcoming
growing season

BEST OF
DIY
PROJECTS



Designing Gardens with Canva
Plant to Watch: Petchoa
Working with a Garden Designer
Bulb and Bare-Root Garden

URBAN
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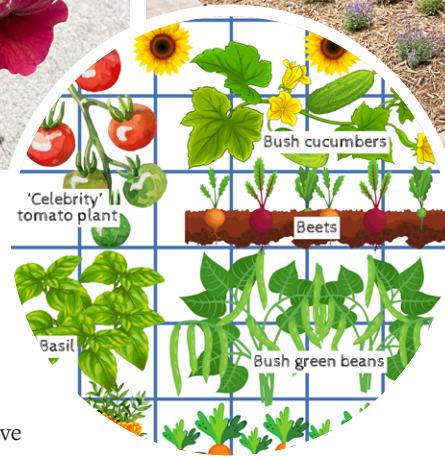


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A note from the MINNESOTA STATE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

It all started with the apple. Back in 1866, we took on the challenge of growing this tasty fruit in our northern climate. Over time, we spread deep roots, championing not only fruit growing but also the many areas of horticulture in rural and urban Minnesota and beyond.

The longest running horticultural society in the United States, we're a trusted resource for thousands of northern gardeners. Serving all ages and skill levels across USDA Hardiness Zones 3, 4 and 5 (Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Michigan, Montana, Alaska, Canada and more), we offer cold-climate gardening resources to support our members, garden clubs, plant societies, program participants, the horticultural industry and anyone who wants to grow plants in our challenging northern climate and positively impact the environment.

Deeply rooted in our mission to cultivate a healthy, diverse, sustainable community of northern gardeners, we publish *Northern Gardener*® magazine and grow cold-climate gardeners through educational classes, events and two signature community outreach programs, Garden-in-a-Box and Minnesota Green. *Let's grow!*



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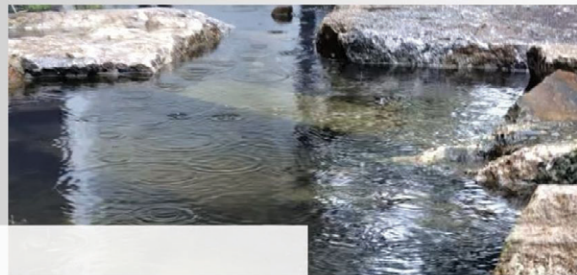
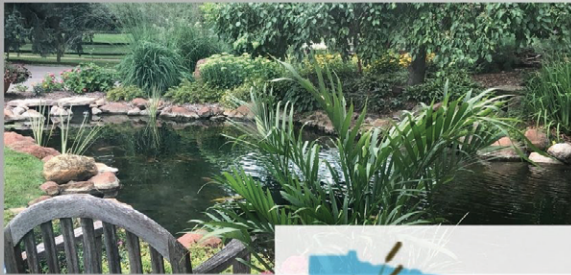
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2024 brought some serious garden magic.

We dreamed, designed, sowed, planted, watered, weeded and harvested. We braved jumping worms, Japanese beetles and some surprisingly soggy weather. We fell in love with new plants, savored another year with old favorites and surely killed a few things along the way, as all gardeners inevitably do. Growing plants, sinking bare hands and feet in the soil and soaking in the sunshine and fresh air is some of most life-giving stuff of summer—and, if you're like me, you're already dreaming of digging in again in a few months.

To help you prepare, we've packed this issue full of spring planning tips and inspiration. Creating or revamping garden beds? We recommend when and why you might work with a landscape designer. More of a DIY-er? Learn how you can use the popular Canva design program to create your own garden plans. And who doesn't love getting the inside scoop on the season's hottest new plants? Sneak a peek at new introductions coming to garden centers near you. And our recommended winter reading list is a buffet of the very best, all titles cherry-picked by our very own *Northern Gardener* contributors.

With such a short growing season and so much to share, we've grown this digital bonus issue from an email to a full-blown mini, online magazine for you. Us northern gardeners know, best not to write off winter—these sleepier months are the perfect time to read, plan and beef up so we can hit the ground running come spring. We hope this guide helps tide you over through winter and gives you a giant jumpstart for the coming growing season.

Rebecca Swee

Rebecca Swee, Editor in Chief
 editor@northerngardener.org



Headshot: Tracy Walsh Photography | Helleborus blooms: Rebecca Swee | Mushroom grow kits: R&R Cultivation | Microgreens grow kits: Erik Bergstrom | Spring seed bombs: Eric Johnson

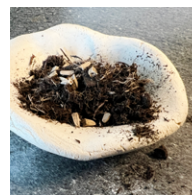
PROJECTS FOR *Spring*

Just because it's cold outside doesn't mean the gardening fun has to stop. While you are waiting for the ground to thaw, try these ways to bring the gardening indoors and get ready for spring.



« **INDOOR MUSHROOM GROW KITS** are a fun winter project from R&R Cultivation in New Hope, Minn. rrcultivation.com

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Winter Reading:

Our Favorite Garden Books

If anyone knows about sharing the magic of gardening through words, it's our *Northern Gardener* contributors. Hailing from Wisconsin to New York, these cold-climate gardening pros know a thing or two about writing well about growing. When we asked them to share their favorite gardening books of 2024, most lamented that picking just one felt like "choosing a favorite plant or child." Here are their top picks.



Find these titles and more at northerngardener.org/bookshop

SUSAN BARBIERI > Two favorites of mine are excellent additions to any plant-based reading diet. In Ann Patchett's *State of Wonder*, a young doctor is sent to the Amazon jungle to find her mentor, a clinical pharmacologist who has gone missing while researching a potential miracle fertility drug. *Garden Dreams*, illustrated and edited by Ferris Cook, is a charming little volume of inspirational essays about writers' gardens, both imagined and remembered. Simple but beautiful Art Nouveau-style illustrations. OMG!!! I almost forgot Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, an epic novel that traces the experiences of a diverse group of people whose connection to trees unites them in a quest to stop the destruction of forests.

MICHELLE BRUHN > I suggest any of Jeff Lowenfels' *Teaming with...* books (especially microbes, bacteria and fungi). *Teaming with Nutrients* is his latest and a real soil nerd-out book. I also adore Charles Dowding's *No Dig Gardening Course 1*, which includes quizzes for the extra nerdy! My old faithfuls include *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy, *The Year-Round Vegetable Gardener* by Nikki Jabbour, Toby Hemenway's *Gaia's Garden* and, more recently, Jessica Walliser's *Plant Partners*. For local garden history, I enjoyed the story behind the formation of Minneapolis' Eloise Butler Wildflower Gardens in *The Wild Gardener: The Life and Selected Writings of Eloise Butler* by Martha Hellander.

MEG COWDEN > For an incredible narrative nonfiction book any gardener will devour, pick up *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth* by Zoë Schlanger. It was my favorite nonfiction book I read this year.

GAIL HUDSON > My favorite handy resources are *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* by Michael A. Dirr, *The Vegetable Gardener's Bible* by Edward C. Smith and *Perennials for Minnesota and Wisconsin* by Don Engebretson and Don Williamson.

ERIC JOHNSON > *The Well Tended Perennial Garden* by Tract DiSabato-Aust is my go-to and a modern classic (20+ years old!). I also revisit *The New York Times 1,000 Gardening Questions and Answers* remarkably often. It's a fun one to just pick up and read—bursting with good advice.

AMY KAINZ > Four of my favorites are: *Great Garden Companions* by Sally Jean Cunningham, *The Garden Maker's Book of Wonders* by Allison Vallin Kostovick, *Roses Love Garlic* and *Carrots Love Tomatoes* by Louise Riotte.

BURTON LAINE > *Get Fit Through Gardening: Advice, Tips and Tools for Better Health* by Jeffrey P. Restuccio emphasizes enjoying gardening by stretching beforehand, using the right tools in the correct way and balancing activities. It's easy to overdo one activity and strain muscles. I refer to *Ball Complete Book of Home Preserving*, edited by Judi Kingly and Lauren Devine, every year. It's always best to have the most updated version of this gardening classic!

DIANE MCGANN > I've always liked *Continuous Bloom* and *Continuous Color*, both by Pam Duthie. I'm always trying to maximize both, so these books have been helpful.

KATHY PURDY > At least once a year, I read about two gardeners in Vermont (zone 4) in *A Year at North Hill* by Wayne Winterrowd and Joe Eck and revisit what to do when, how to get not-quite-hardy-enough plants to survive and more. I also read David Culp's *The Layered Garden* in the middle of winter, when I'm starved for winter color, because the photos are so good. He reminds us to pack the garden with plants by layering, grow what does well for you, dive deep into any genus that thrives in your space and respect the land and conditions. In *The Garden in Every Sense and Season*, Tovah Martin reminds us to use all our senses in every season. I enjoy my garden more after reading this book, a good reminder to pay attention more and fret less. On a more practical note, Philip Harnden's *A Gardener's Guide to Frost* serves up everything you need to know about frost but forgot to ask.

JENNIFER RENSENBRINK > Minnesota-based Heather Holm's *Pollinators of Native Plants* gave me such an appreciation of all the various insects flying and crawling around my native plant garden. The sheer variety of them is breathtaking. Holm organizes the book by plant, so you can look up Joe Pye weed and see the types of pollinators that typically visit it. I keep revisiting Jessica Walliser's *Plant Partners: Science-Based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden*, which provides science-backed ideas for your garden, such as underplanting zucchini or pumpkins with nasturtiums for pollinator support and to deter squash bugs. Lynn Steiner's *Landscaping with Native Plants of Minnesota* is an oldie but a goodie. A Minnesota resident, Steiner provides detailed plant profiles of native plants, from grasses to trees, that work well in the home garden landscape. If you are new to native plant gardening, this book is for you.

MICHELLE MERO RIEDEL > I couldn't pass up the attention-grabbing title of this little guide about prickly, spiny outdoor and houseplants: *Prick: Cacti and Succulents: Choosing, Styling, Caring* by Gynelle Leon.



MARY SCHIER > I prefer gardening books with personality. Barbara Damrosch's *A Life in the Garden: Tales and Tips for Growing Food in Every Season* traces her 40-plus year gardening journey. She has strong opinions about what to grow (she gives a vigorous defense of parsley!) and how to grow it, all steeped in years of growing experience. A bonus for northern gardeners is that she lives in Maine and provides lots of information on season-stretching techniques. Maria Failla's *Growing Joy: The Plant Lover's Guide to Cultivating Happiness (and Plants)* is geared toward young houseplant growers. Failla, who also has a fun podcast on houseplants, views caring for plants as a meditative, almost spiritual practice. Slowing down to care for your plants helps you relax and savor life, she says. I could not agree more!

BETH STETENFELD > A few nonfiction books I've enjoyed with a gardening/growing/plant theme include *The Plant Hunter* by Cassandra Quave, *Lab Girl* by Hope Jahren, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer and *Mrs. Whaley and Her Charleston Garden* by Emily Whaley.

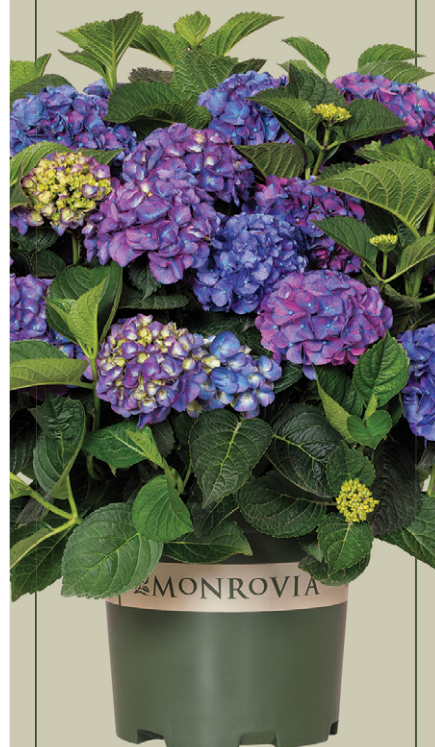
TRACY WALSH > I love Mary Jo Hoffman's *Still: The Art of Noticing* and *The Biophilia Effect* by Clemens G. Arvay.


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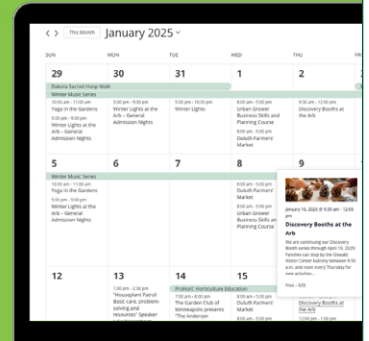
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NEW PLANTS FOR THE NEW YEAR

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STORY **RYAN MCENANEY**



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HONEYCOMB BLUE
GRAMA GRASS

TALKING ABOUT NEW PLANTS for the 2025 season feels like Christmas in January! As we dream about warmer weather and think about spaces in the landscape that need a little something new next year, I'm excited to share my favorite new varieties for the season.

Now, I understand there may be some trepidation around new plants. I get a lot of questions when I'm out and about: Do they live up to the marketing hype? Are they really different from what's already in garden centers? Will they survive in Minnesota?

So, my recommendations are based on trials and introductions that are vetted by our team at Bailey Nurseries to survive and thrive in Minnesota gardens! Let's dig into the fun.

First Editions® FlowerFull® Smooth Hydrangea

Do you love Annabelle or other smooth hydrangeas, but get bummed out when they topple over once rain and wind hit? Well, FlowerFull® is here to solve that for you. This new introduction was bred and tested in Cottage Grove, Minn. and has proven itself to be the strongest smooth hydrangea I've seen, standing tall through fall, even after heavy wind and rain. On top of that, it's got more than double the flowers of the standard. So, more flowers and they stay upright in the garden, making this new variety a must-have replacement for our Upper Midwest garden staple.

Dream Cloud™ Manchurian Lilac

I especially love Dream Cloud™ because it extends the lilac season, with this new introduction blooming in early summer after your spring-blooming common lilac. The large, fluffy pink flowers are so profuse that you almost can't see the leaves and absolutely fills the landscape with that classic lilac fragrance. Dream Cloud™ also only gets about 4-5' tall and wide, so planting it near the house to capture the fragrance won't overtake the foundation.

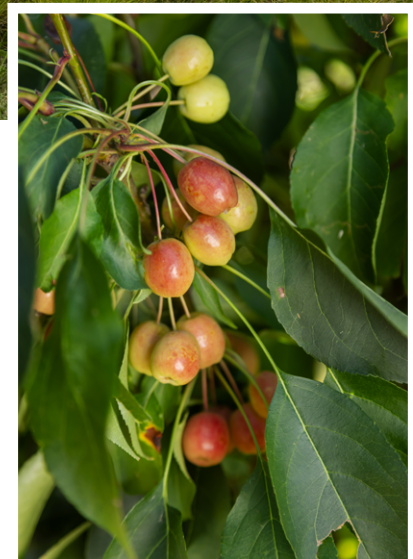


Honeycomb Blue Grama Grass

I'm a sucker for a good ornamental grass, and this Illinois-bred blue grama grass is a total winner. We planted Honeycomb by the hundreds in the Bailey Nurseries display garden because of its compact, clumping form and stunning texture that it brings to the late summer landscape. As the golden inflorescence emerges, it looks almost like the tip of a mascara brush, which adds so much interest hanging delicately above the stem and surrounding companion plants. The species is native to Minnesota, making it an even more enticing option for our gardens.

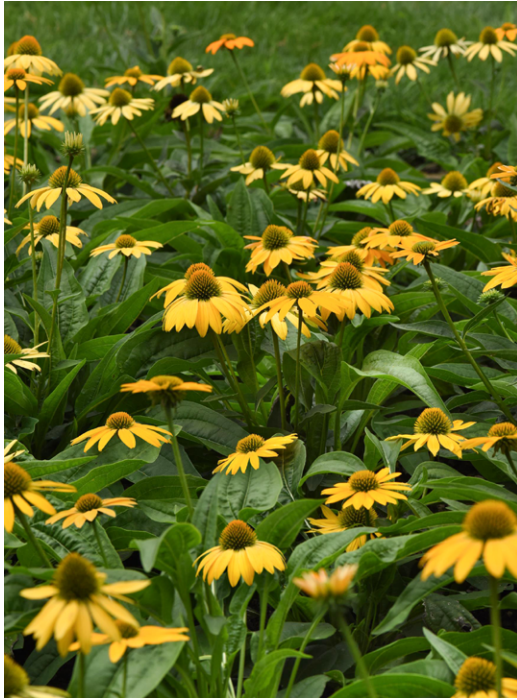
Kudos® Apple

Who doesn't love a University of Minnesota apple, right? Next in their infamous series is Kudos®, which is a cross between Honeycrisp and Zestar!® that the U calls a "sister" to SweeTango®. Kudos® has a sweet, but not overpowering flavor with a touch of tropical overtones. If you've got space for fruit trees in your yard, Kudos® is an exciting next step in the Minnesota-based apple breeding program.



First Editions® Green Wall Spire™ Crabapple

Green Wall Spire™ Crabapple gets me excited for a couple key reasons. It gives the landscape all four seasons, which we need in our cold-climate gardens. And it is a structural, columnar tree, which is a really cool differentiator for crabapples. I always love when a well-loved plant takes the standard and spins it into something new, and that's exactly what Green Wall Spire™ does. Pink buds open to bright white flowers in spring, which turn to red fruit in summer. That fruit stays on the tree all season, accenting the green foliage as it turns to bronze in fall, and brightening up the tree when the leaves fall in winter.



^

Artisan™ Yellow Ombre Coneflower

If you're looking for a colorful new perennial for the landscape, I love Artisan™ Yellow Ombre Coneflower. This All-America Selections-winning variety comes from a series of coneflower in various colors and is known for its proliferation of blooms on sturdy stems, intense golden-yellow flowers that bloom all season, and compact size for a small garden or deco pot. Artisan™ Yellow Ombre is also disease resistant, so it's mostly a set-it-and-forget-it plant that just keeps performing all season long, year after year.

Wondering where to find these new plants? Head over to the Bailey website to find retail partners in your area: baileynurseries.com/find-a-retailer. Give your favorite local garden center a call to make sure they'll have the specific plant you want on hand this spring, then start dreaming of where it'll go in the garden. 🌿

Want to chat about these new plants? Find Ryan on Instagram: @RyanPlantsPlants

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<h3 style="color: #800040; margin: 0;">Spring Plant Sale</h3> <p style="color: #800040; margin: 0;">Saturday, May 17, 9am-2pm</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Hopkins Pavilion, 11000 Excelsior Blvd., Hopkins, MN</p> <p style="color: #002060; margin: 10px 0;">Offering perennials, annuals, natives, vegetables, herbs & more!</p> <p style="margin: 0;">20,000+ Plants—More than ever before! One of the largest plant sales in Hennepin County. Bring your wagon!</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Fully staffed by Master Gardener Volunteers ready to answer all your gardening questions. Free parking!</p> <p style="color: #800040; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;">To learn more: Hennepinmastergardeners.org/events/spring-plant-sale/</p>	<h3 style="color: #800040; margin: 0;">Learning Garden Tour</h3> <p style="color: #800040; margin: 0;">Saturday, July 12, 8:30am-4:30pm</p> <p style="color: #002060; margin: 10px 0;">Explore 10 inspiring gardens!</p> <p style="margin: 0;">This year's self-guided tour showcases 10 gardens in the southwest suburbs of Hennepin County. Join us for inspiration, education, and garden-related shopping.</p> <p style="color: #002060; margin: 10px 0;">Cost: \$15 in advance; \$20 day of tour.</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Discounts for groups of 10 or more. Children under 12 free with a paying adult. Tour held rain or shine.</p> <p style="color: #800040; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;">To buy tickets & learn more: Hennepinmastergardeners.org/events/learning-garden-tour/</p>
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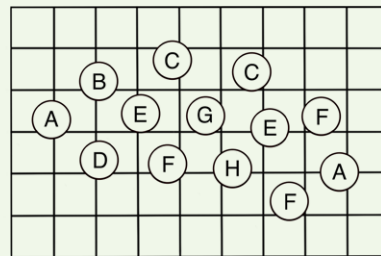
STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS **AMY KAINZ**



This 6-foot by 9-foot bed packed full of bulbs and bare-root plants features a vibrant blend of bold colors and intriguing textures, offering dynamic blooms throughout the growing season. Designed with layers of height and striking contrasts, it creates visual interest as each plant takes its turn to shine. Perfect for planting in spring once the threat of frost has passed, this design ensures a continuous display of captivating beauty, with blooms that transition seamlessly from one season to the next. The mix of foliage and flowers offers ever-evolving beauty, inviting gardeners of all skill levels to enjoy a stunning, low-maintenance outdoor space.

Find these bulbs and similar options available for purchase at the Minnesota State Horticultural Society's booth at the Minneapolis Home + Garden Show March 5-9, 2025.

The Plan



- A.** Lily Looks™ 'Tiny Rocket'
- B.** *Iris siberica* 'Butter & Sugar'
- C.** Canna 'Australia'
- D.** Astilbe 'Vision in Red'
- E.** Lily Looks™ 'Tiny Double Dutch'
- F.** *Hosta* 'Frances Williams'
- G.** *Liatris spicata* 'Floristan White'
- H.** Dahlia 'GoGo Two Tone Purple/White'

Plant to Watch:

PETCHOA

Be a trendsetter and try this new(ish), vigorous plant in the popular petunia family.

STORY AND PHOTOS MICHELLE MERO RIEDEL



Petchoa care

Annual flowering petchoa is an exciting addition to any garden, container, window box or hanging basket. Although it prefers full sun, I placed a few plants in a part-sun location. The plants performed well, but I noticed they had fewer blooms and branching compared to their full-sun counterparts. Even so, if you don't have a full-sun location you can still enjoy petchoas.

For success, plant petchoas in well-drained soil enriched with organic matter. They prefer high quality potting mix in containers. Or, if you place them in the ground, add some compost to the hole.

Wherever you plant petchoas, keep them evenly moist. They don't like to droop and dry out. If they get too much water, the roots will rot.

Fertilizing is important for petunias, calibrachos and petchoas. I add immediate-release fertilizer (in powder form, follow instructions on the container) to my watering can and pour the mixture onto my petchoas along with all other plants in my pot. A well-balanced fertilizer (20-20-20) will do; add it to plants weekly (preferred) or twice a month. Fertilizing is the secret to burgeoning blooms.

Deadheading isn't necessary, as petchoa leaves are not sticky and they have fewer hairs than standard petunias. This allows petchoa flowers to fall to the ground or blow away in the wind instead of sticking to foliage.

Breeders say petchoa plants don't need shaping. Though, from mid- to late-July, I still like to give them a good trim with my garden shears, removing about 25 percent of the lower leaves and flowers. They bounce back quickly with more branching and blooms along with an even better mounded habit.



Top left: Petchoas combine attractively with other sunny annuals. Here I combined SuperCal® Premium Pearl White with Begonia Solenia Chocolate/Orange and Lantana Landmark Gold.
Bottom right: SuperCal® Premium Bordeaux

Geraniums, snapdragons and zinnias... we love filling containers and beds with tried and true annuals. But what gardener doesn't love the buzz around a hot, new plant on the scene? Still unknown to many northern gardeners, petchoa will be in garden centers this spring—and it's worth grabbing.

Petchoa's parents

A hybrid plant, petchoa is a successful cross between the old-fashioned, long-loved petunia and a smaller version called calibrachoa (also known as million bells) developed in the early 1990s. Plant breeders combined the two and came up with a new genus called petchoa. It's pronounced "pet-ko'uh" and combines the beginning of "petunia" with the ending from "calibrachoa."

When I started gardening 30 years ago, petunias were my go-to plant. I loved their strong root system and robust, early season blooms, but they had their faults. Over the years, I grew tired of their mid- to late-season leggy stems, sticky flowers and fussy growth during hot and wet weather. I switched over to calibrachos shortly after they were introduced. Calibrachoa flowers are smaller and compact (which means they're less leggy). Another perk? They require less pruning and care to maximize their performance.

To produce petchoas, breeders took the best petunia genes, which include large, 3-inch flowers, heavy-duty roots and the ability to withstand cool spring and fall weather. They combined those petunia genes with calibrachoa's low-maintenance flowers and lush, non-sticky foliage. The result? The petunia and calibrachoa produced a superstar annual plant.

Petchoas at a Glance



BEST ATTRIBUTES

Here are six reasons why you'll love petchoas!

- 1** Our summers are getting warmer, and petchoa plants can handle heat better than their parents.
- 2** Unlike petunias, petchoas are not disturbed by windy and rainy conditions, as their flowers remain open or bounce back quickly.
- 3** Their tubular flowers attract butterflies and other pollinators.
- 4** They are more disease resistant than their parents.
- 5** They are more cool-weather resistant than both petunias and calibrachoa. They can handle frost and temperatures dipping into the 20s (Fahrenheit).
- 6** Petchoas are sterile, so they don't produce seed.

THE DETAILS

Pronunciation: "pet-ko'uh"
Common name: SuperCal®
Latin name: *Petunia X Calibrachoa*
Relatives: Annual petunia and calibrachoa
Hardiness zones: USDA Zones 10-11
Light: Requires full sun (6+ hours), but will accept part-sun (4-6 hours)
Soil: Evenly moist, well-drained, organic soil
Water: Regularly so plants don't droop
Fertilizer: Once a week with immediate release
Size: 14-20 inches tall
Habit: Check plant tags, as some are upright mounding, some are trailing and some are both
Care: Little to no deadheading or pinching
Use: Excellent filler plant in garden bed or container
New in 2025: *Petchoa Caliburst™ Yellow*

HOW TO BUY

Check your local nursery in the petunia and calibrachoa sections. Most likely the petchoa plant tag will say SuperCal®, their common name. I was able to find them locally at many nurseries near the Twin Cities in Minnesota.

You can also find petchoas at the Friends School Plant Sale May 9-11, 2025. They plan to carry six different colors! Members of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society enjoy a discount at this sale. friendsschoolplantsale.com



Meet a Petchoa Enthusiast

I was first introduced to petchoas while shopping at the yearly Friends School Plant Sale (FSPS), located at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds every Mother's Day weekend. It is the biggest nonprofit plant sale in the United States.

A superfan of petchoas for more than 10 years, FSPS volunteer Nancy Scherer is an experienced gardener and one of the plant buyers for the sale. She incorporates petchoas in her planters and in the ground, and she knows a solid flower performer when she sees one.

"It is one of the plants at the sale that one or more of us declares we would like to go stand by and explain to people why they should try it." Nancy says. "I forget what year, but we did once include an article in the catalog about the 'dogs,' or the plants that might be unfamiliar and not look like much on the tables at the sale, but that would turn out to be wonderful." 🌿

Should I Work with a Garden Designer?

Plus, options if you don't have the budget right now.

STORY **MARY LAHR SCHIER**

GARDEN DESIGNERS BRING PERSPECTIVE, creativity and technical knowledge to your project. When the fit is right, they can turn your ideas and dreams into plants and spaces you love.

They're skilled at solving problems, whether it's a tired landscape with diseased plants, issues with water, drainage or grading or the challenge of creating new outdoor entertaining areas or a specific style of garden.

"Designers are going to find creative solutions for tough spaces that you may not have thought of," says Angela Cesar, a designer with Southview Design in St. Paul, Minn. They also can help homeowners stay within a budget by offering cost-effective options for stone, retaining walls or other hardscapes or suggesting a plant palette that will thrive in your space. Because most designers work with installation companies, they also act as a very helpful go-between to make sure the plan is clear to the crew installing it.

"Having something on paper is a planning tool, but also a communications tool," says Rebekah Johnson, a landscape architect who works with Saline Landscaping in Duluth, Minn. "It sets up expectations for homeowners who may be spending a lot of money on a project."

WORKING WITH A DESIGNER

Most designers recommend you talk with more than one firm before hiring a landscape professional. Look for someone who understands your vision (or who supplies it, if that's what you need), who communicates well and is clear about things like cost and timelines.

During a preliminary visit, the designer will walk the property to determine the scope of the project and get a feel for your interests and the terrain. Once hired, designers will take exact measurements of your property and its features



(house, out-buildings, established trees and plants) and create a base map.

From the base map and information they gather from you, the designer will create one or more concept plans for your review. "The clients are talking about how they want to live in the space," Johnson says. "As a designer, I'm thinking about that but about other things as well." Soil, water and the context or environment of the landscape influence the design.

As the concept becomes a concrete plan, you'll make decisions about materials and plants. While budget should be discussed from the beginning, this is the point at which budget affects choices most. This is also the time to think about long-term maintenance. "We like to talk about how the homeowner wants to be involved over the long-term, financially or physically," says Danielle Massa, a garden designer and sales manager at Bachman's in Minneapolis, Minn.

When you approve the design, the project is scheduled, which may take several months given our short growing season. Homeowners should be prepared for surprises during installation, too. "You would not believe how many buried stumps from trees no one knew about we discover every season," Massa says. Something unexpected may require additional work or a slight change in plans.

Want to have a smooth design process? Bring photos and ideas about what you like.

"Our season is so short that the more information people come with in the beginning of the process, the easier it will be to expedite the project," says Kai Halverson, a landscape architect with Southview Design. "We have the answers as the professionals in the discussion, but the homeowner has to live with it."

3 WAYS TO WORK WITH DESIGNERS

CONSULT ONLY.

Garden centers often offer one-hour, on-site consultations. The designer may walk the site with you and make plant or design recommendations. This works best for small, do-it-yourself projects. Garden centers offer this service in hopes you will buy plants from them.

Approximate cost: \$150

DESIGN ONLY.

To create a custom landscape plan, a designer measures your property, draws a to-scale plant and hardscape map and recommends ways to handle water, screening and other site-specific issues. This is a good option if you plan to install the landscape over time or do some work yourself.

Approximate cost: \$2,000 is typical but fees vary widely depending on size and scope of the project.

DESIGN/BUILD.

This most common option is best for larger landscape projects, especially those incorporating walls, paths and patios. A designer works with you to envision the landscape, address site issues and create a plant palette you like. Then the company provides a bid, usually including the design fee, to install the project.

Approximate cost: Design portion runs \$500 - \$2,000. Build portion varies depending on goals and property size.

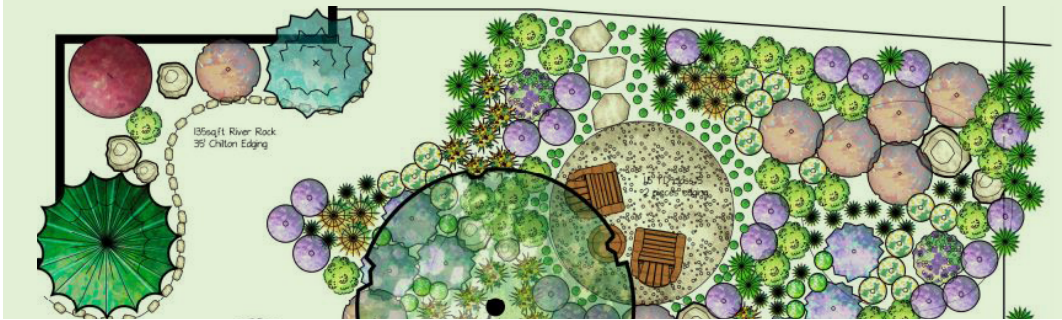
DIY CAN'T AFFORD A DESIGNER RIGHT NOW?

Take a class. Join our most popular workshop, *Sustainable Landscape Design Basics*. This 5-session, online series kicks off Feb. 26. northerngardener.org/classes

Find a plan. Scan magazines and visit the Northern Gardener Resource Hub at northerngardener.org to find inspiration and ready-to-use designs from prairie pocket to cut flower gardens. Make sure the plan will work for your site and the plants will thrive in your soil, sun exposure and hardiness zone.

Copy a landscape you admire. Go on garden tours and find beds or landscapes you love. Take pictures or jot a quick sketch. If you hire a designer, these notes will help them understand what you like.

Go full DIY. Draw your dream landscape using an online program such as Canva. See the article on the next page for Canva garden design tips.



DESIGNERS SAY...



"Designers are going to find creative solutions for tough spaces that you may not have thought of."

Angela Cesar

Designer,
Southview Design,
St. Paul, Minn.



"We like to talk about how the homeowner wants to be involved over the long-term, financially or physically."

Danielle Massa

Garden designer and sales manager, Bachman's,
Minneapolis, Minn.



"We have the answers as the professionals in the discussion, but the homeowner has to live with it."

Kai Halverson

Landscape architect,
Southview Design,
St. Paul, Minn.



"Having something on paper is a planning tool, but also a communications tool."

Rebekah Johnson

Landscape architect,
Saline Landscaping,
Duluth, Minn.

DIY

Designing Gardens with Canva

Add Canva to your garden toolbox and create your own affordable garden designs at home.

STORY AND PHOTOS **ERIC JOHNSON**



GARDENING IS A VISUAL ACTIVITY FOR ME. Yes, it's also tactile, and I love the scents and sounds, but mostly, I garden for the color and beauty it provides. We all approach it differently; some of us are planners and some of us are more freeform. I like to plot my garden beds and containers. Not only does it help me ensure success, but I enjoy it. Sketching out summer garden plans in the wintertime is a balm for this gardener's soul.

Over the last few years, I've used Canva, the online design program, to sketch out my garden beds and to help conceptualize container plantings. Building a bed or border on the screen first allows me to see how varying colors and shapes and textures work with one another and determine how many plants will comfortably fill a space. The program is easy to learn and use and allows anyone to create videos, presentations, invitations, event flyers... the list goes on. It's reasonably priced (or free) and an easy tool for plant people to visualize designs on paper via the computer.

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH CANVA

Visit [Canva.com](https://www.canva.com) and sign up for an account. Canva offers two levels—a free and a paid version. You can get along fine with the free version but, as you might expect, the paid level provides more features, such as more photos and graphics to choose from. The catalog of plants included

with the paid level will amaze you. The \$15 a month fee bumps down to \$10 a month if you sign up for a year, and they offer a 30-day free trial. If you can imagine using this platform for other projects in your life, the paid level is worth it, but fair warning—it's fun to work in and you may end up being the go-to person for fundraising flyers and family reunion invites.

Canva is easy to learn, intuitive and user-friendly. The “help” that is built into the program will answer most of your questions and a Google search is a great resource, too. Plus, you can find free Canva tutorials all over YouTube. As with anything, digging in and exploring is the best way to learn the program. I'll walk through the steps I take to create a garden bed groundplan to get you started. I will use the paid level for this, but most of what I do can be done at the free level, though not as many plants will be available.

As with anything, the more you practice, the better you get at Canva. Give yourself permission to play. It's fun! To really learn it, you need to use it. There is a plethora of trainings and tutorials out there, including many within Canva.

Consider downloading the Canva app to your phone to work in when you're on the go. You can design plantings anywhere. Assembling a container garden as you wait for a doctor's appointment is quite soothing.

6

STEPS TO CREATE A GARDEN BED GROUNDPLAN

1

BUILD YOUR BLANK CANVAS TO DESIGN ON.

In a nutshell, I create the garden bed blank canvas with a one-inch to one-foot scale and then place shapes mimicking the plants at their mature size in the bed. It's a gardener's video game!

Click on "custom size" in the row of icons near the top right (figure 1a). Select "inches" in the dropdown options and enter the height and width of your garden bed (figure 1b). Click "create new design" and—ta-da!—you have a document. As mentioned, I design at a one-inch equals one-foot scale. For a 10-foot by 14-foot garden bed, I create a document that is 10 by 14 inches.

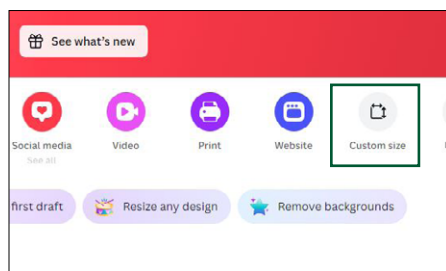


Figure 1a



Figure 1b



2

ADD RULERS AND A GRID TO AID IN DESIGN.

Go to "file" → "view settings" → "show rulers and guides" to display rulers on the top and side of your design (figure 2a). Then, again, go to "file" → "view settings" → "add guides," click on "custom" and enter the number of columns and rows to match the height and width of your design and click "add guides." (figure 2b) In my example, I used 14 rows and 10 columns. Canva will automatically lock the guides, which is a good thing. If you need to change them, you will need to unlock them.

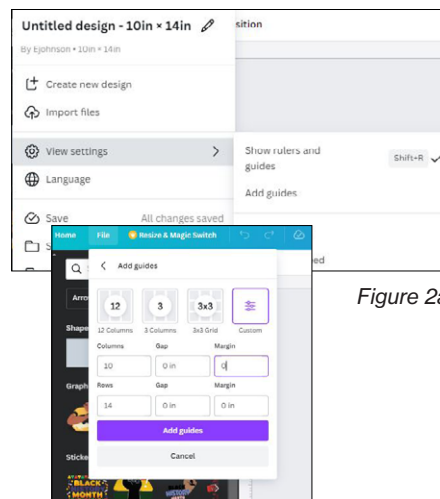


Figure 2a

Figure 2b

3

ADD STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS.

As with actual garden design, begin with incorporating elements like sidewalks, rocks and structures. Go to "elements" and search for shapes that mimic what you are looking for. You can use a single circle, square, rectangle, etc. to represent it. Click on the shape you find in elements once to place it on the grid, and then use the handles on the sides to adjust the shape. Use the circles on the corners to scale the shape larger or smaller. You can also place several of the shapes and "group" them to mimic a feature. To group elements, drag your mouse over all the items to select them and an option to "group" them will pop up. You can also hold down the shift key (or the Alt key on Macs) and select the items in sequence.

You can also search for graphic images, such as pavers and rocks, in "elements" to add these items (figure 3). When you have found one you like, click on it once and it will appear on the design. You can select the element, drag the corners in or out to resize and position it wherever you like.

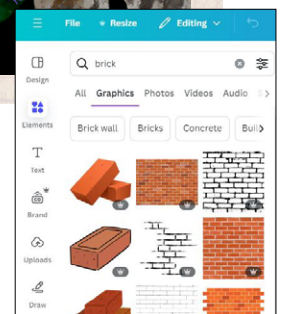


Figure 3

4

ADD PLANTS TO THE DESIGN.

I use two methods to add plants. First, I'll search for a plant in the "elements" tab. You will be surprised at how specific you can get with the variety; 'Sum and Substance' hosta and *Ligularia dentata* 'Desdemona' are a couple of examples (figure 4a). If a graphic I like appears, I click on it and it lands on the groundplan. Some images will have a transparent background, which is perfect. In the paid version, you can remove the background in a photo. Select an image and click on "BG remover" in the bar at the top and, poof, no background.

I also like to use "frames," which are found in the "elements" tab. Scroll down towards the bottom to find the frames option (figure 4b). Frames are shapes you can drag a photo or graphic over so that they fill the frame. Find a shape that mimics the general shape of the plant or a grouping of plants. I use ovals and blobs (the actual term Canva uses). Place the chosen frame in the design and size and position it. I search for a particular plant and, when I've found it, I drag it onto the frame to fill it.

When placing elements in your design, it's helpful to be familiar with the "position" option that brings elements backwards and forwards in the design. Click on your element, then click on "position" and move forward and backward. You can also select the element and right-click on it to bring up the option. If you select "show layers," all the layers will appear in a column to the left and you can arrange the order in which they will appear. Alt+1 in Windows is a shortcut for this.

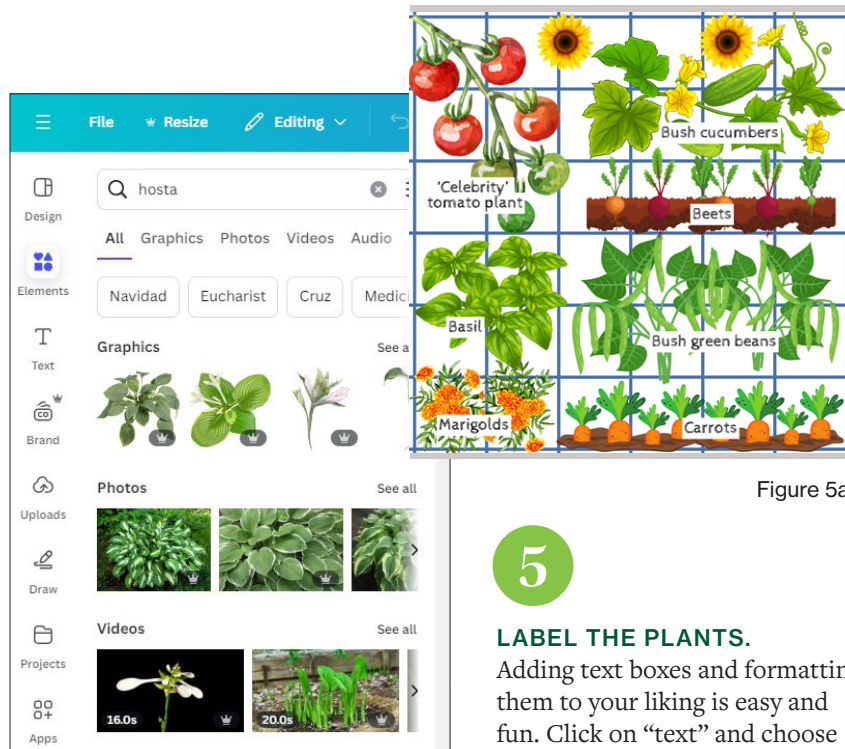


Figure 4a

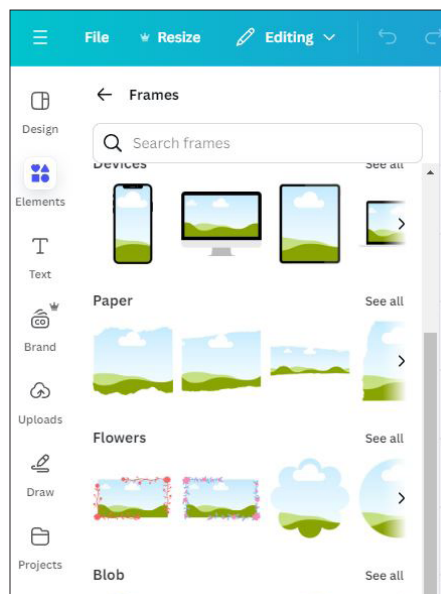


Figure 4b

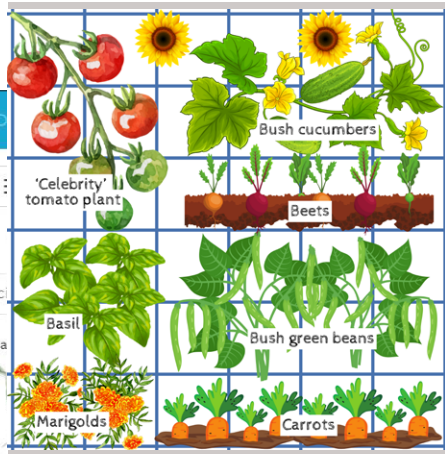


Figure 5a

5

LABEL THE PLANTS.

Adding text boxes and formatting them to your liking is easy and fun. Click on "text" and choose a "text style." When you click on one, it will be added to your design. Format with the font and size of your choice and position over the plant. You can resize the type by dragging the corners in and out. With a text box selected, click on "effects" and choose "background," which will help your text stand out.

6

DOWNLOAD YOUR GROUNDPLAN.

Go to "share" → "download" and select an option to download your design to your computer. You can print your design or even share it on social media and wow your friends. 🌿



Rather watch a Canva video tutorial?
Watch now at tinyurl.com/canvagarden



SEW A GROW BAG

Make your own grow bags in the off-season so you're ready to fill them with soil, seeds and starts come spring.

[northerngardener.org/
diy-grow-bag](http://northerngardener.org/diy-grow-bag)



BUILD A BEE HOUSE

One of the most remarkable insects in the garden, the mason bee can do the work of 500 honey bees. Attract these industrious pollinators to your yard by creating a home for them.

[northerngardener.org/
mason-bee-houses](http://northerngardener.org/mason-bee-houses)



CREATE A TABLETOP WATER GARDEN

Dress up your patio table or balcony with a cute mini water garden this summer.

[northerngardener.org/
diy-tabletop-water-gardens](http://northerngardener.org/diy-tabletop-water-gardens)

BEST OF 2024

DIY Projects from the Northern Gardener Blog

PLAN YOUR OWN PRAIRIE GARDEN

Is 2025 the year you'll create a mini prairie that looks intentional and supports wildlife? If you're willing to roll up your sleeves and put in some work, it's within reach.

[northerngardener.org/
prairie-garden-planning](http://northerngardener.org/prairie-garden-planning)



BUILD A COLD FRAME

If you're itching to get a jumpstart on growing this spring, try creating your own custom cold frames using scrap materials with this affordable home project. *Bonus:* You can even use cold frames to help potted seedlings acclimate to the outdoors!

[northerngardener.org/
diy-cold-frames](http://northerngardener.org/diy-cold-frames)



PROPAGATE HOUSEPLANTS

Clamoring to sink your hands in some soil? When you need a midwinter plant fix, propagation is a fun, easy and affordable way to grow more plants from your own collection or any favorites from friends or family.

[northerngardener.org/
propagating-houseplants](http://northerngardener.org/propagating-houseplants)



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